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ABSTRACT

East Carolina University, Greenville (North Carolina) uses a semester hour credit course as its method of teaching library-research skills to freshmen. The course is required of all new students and is designed to introduce them to the academic library. The usefulness of the course was studied through an exploration of attitude changes among 110 students taking the course. Most students indicated that they had previous instruction in library skills. Pretests and post-tests showed major attitude changes in two areas. At the onset of the course, 17% of students believed that they could find adequate resources to complete a paper, while after the course, 90% thought that they could turn out a well-researched paper. On the precourse survey, 15% indicated that they did not feel comfortable doing research in the campus library, and 51% did not know if they felt comfortable. After the course, 95% reported that they felt comfortable doing research in the library. Skills testing reflected an improvement in every area after course completion. Results support the usefulness of the course as a possible approach to library-skills development. Appendixes present the survey and the skills test. (Contains eight references.) (SLD)

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LIBS 1000: A Credit Course in Library Skills at East Carolina University

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Running head: LIBS 1000: A CREDIT COURSE IN LIBRARY SKILLS AT EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Most university freshmen have had some exposure to library skills in their previous educational experiences. Nevertheless, many do not possess the needed skills to do effective research in a large academic library.

Library skills can be presented using a variety of methods. Some of the popular ways these skills are presented in the university setting include: orientations, guided tours, course-related instruction, workbooks, computer-assisted instruction, visual materials, handbooks, signs, guides, and credit courses.

There is long-standing disagreement as to the most appropriate method of teaching basic library skills to college and university students. Most of the literature on bibliographic instruction speaks to the use of library sessions scheduled by faculty members who have an immediate need for their students to do research. This is called bibliographic instruction by demand and is helpful when it is used. This researcher's experience is that students are often very unsophisticated when it comes to asking for help with research in the library. Often they are intimidated by the size of the building itself.

Even though the general philosophy in library user education tends to support the on-demand type of instruction, some universities do provide separate courses. University politics and

and funding are often the obstacles when such courses do not exist.

Adams presents theory and practice for developing library courses in a one-of-a-kind text which also explores credit-course offerings at eighteen U. S. colleges and universities. Her book explores possibilities and successful program ideas that can be applied when funding can be made available.[1]

Most studies that have been done in this area focus on student attitudes after having had an on-demand session. For instance, Haw's study of Iowa State University's 1986 graduating class revealed that students who had been required to take a research skills class believed that the course was not only helpful but that it should be required.[2]

Hardesty and others had found similar attitudes among students when a study was completed at De Pauw University evaluating library skills and attitudes after an instructional program was administered.[3] Wood's study confirmed improved attitudes toward the library after a course required at Slippery Rock University.[4]

A study by Mellon at East Carolina University revealed that student emotions ranged from "scary" and "lost" and "helpless" to "confused" and "overpowered" when asked about their feelings in doing library research.[5] Buddy who had studied attitudes prior

to this with academic librarians in Ohio, revealed that freshmen are intimidated by the sheer size of the building, the collections, the technology, and the unfamiliar Library of Congress classification system."

While the studies substantiating results of credit courses in library skills are scarce, there is evidence that the trend is going against instituting new courses and/or maintaining existing courses.

In an article by Chadley and Gavryck, the belief is espoused that with the worsening budgetary restraints and cutbacks of services offered in academic libraries, there will be a "retreat" from programs to teach library skills at a time such courses may be badly needed. The article predicts that not only will the existence of credit courses be threatened, but also that cut-backs of instruction librarians will be made.'

The credit course can be an effective way of orienting students to the academic library. The skills college freshmen gained in high school may not be enough to meet their research needs in a university. A course in research skills can be of great value to undergraduates, not only to increase their ability to use resources in the academic library but also to change attitudes towards the library.

East Carolina University (ECU), in Greenville, North Carolina, uses the semester hour credit course as its method of

teaching library research skills. Library Science 1000 (LIBS 1000) is required of all freshmen and transfer students and is usually taken as a pre-requisite to, or in conjunction with, their required English composition courses.

The credit course is designed to introduce students to the academic library, to its basic and specialized resources--both book and non-book--and to general search strategies. When the course is properly presented, it is hoped that students can confidently and competently apply their skills in the academic setting.

The purpose of this study was to gather data about the usefulness of bibliographic instruction for first semester freshmen in a university setting. This researcher will also reveal attitude changes in freshmen who have taken research skills credit courses. It is the aim of the researcher that this information will assist interested persons in assessing the feasibility of similar approaches to teaching library skills for their use.

Most freshmen are overwhelmed by the size and technology of a medium or large university library. Many do not possess the skills needed to do academic research with confidence and competence. This researcher believes that a credit course in library research skills is appropriate, not only to meet this need, but also to change attitudes toward the academic library.

ECU, established in 1907, is a state-supported coeducational school with a student enrollment of 17,400+.

The campus has three libraries: J. Y. Joyner Library, Health Sciences Library, and the Music Library. This study was concerned only with the use of Joyner, which is on the main campus. Joyner has over 700,000 volumes and subscribes to approximately 5,500 magazines and serials. It also has more than one million items on microforms. Approximately 100 sections of LIBS 1000 are offered during the 1992-93 eight-month academic year. This researcher taught four sections during the first block of Fall 1992. These were chosen for this study. There are approximately 30 students enrolled in each section.

Procedure

LIBS 1000 is taught in seven week blocks twice per semester; thus, four blocks are taught during each 8-month academic year. The course meets twice weekly for a total of fourteen class meetings. The first and fourteenth meetings were survey (test) days, leaving twelve meetings that were used in the following ways: five meetings of lecture and seven workdays where students had hands-on experience in completing assignments in the library under the supervision of this researcher.

On the first day of class, students were told that the instructor wanted information about each one to assist her in assessing student needs and attitudes and to assist her in

teaching the course more effectively. Students were administered a questionnaire (see Appendix) on knowledge and attitudes about using the library at ECU.

On the fourteenth class meeting, each section was administered the identical questionnaire that was given on the first class meeting. The knowledge part of the questionnaire also served as part of the final examination for the course.

Instruction focused primarily on classification, CD Roms, the LS2000 online catalog, periodical and newspaper indexes, and the microfiche serials catalog. One class meeting consisted of a library tour and one class meeting was set aside for an assignment in the microforms collection.

The students were introduced to a "pathfinder" approach (explained in the textbook) and could elect to research English term paper topics in completing LIBS 1000 assignments. Estimated time spent in the library to meet total course requirements ranged from 10-14 hours per student.

The textbook used for the course was Libraries and Research: A Practical Approach, by Collins, Catlett, and Collins, 2nd edition (1990). It includes exercises useful in introducing students to various library resources."

The original survey consisted of approximately 29 students in each section for a total of 117 students. Students who did not attend both survey days were automatically dropped from the sample

leaving a sample total of 110. The pre-and post-surveys were matched by the use of social security numbers provided by the students. The final sample consisted of approximately 28 students per section.

Results

Tabulations for class standing were made and it was learned that 97% of the students participating in the course were first semester freshmen at ECU. The remaining 3% consisted of transfer students new to ECU or upperclassmen.

Question number two of the survey asked that students check all library resources listed that they had used in high school. Eighty seven percent indicated that they had used an online catalog, 83% reported they had been exposed to printed periodical indexes, and 76% indicated they had used indexes to newspapers in the past. Very few students (10%) indicated any previous experience with CD ROM's and less than half of the students (41%) had used a serials catalog.

Students were also asked to indicate on item number three what resources they had used at ECU's library and on all of the same five resources. Less than 2% had used any of these at ECU. By the end of the course, all students had been exposed to all five resources.

The item regarding size of community the student lived in before entering East Carolina was eliminated in the tabulations,

because the responses were not answered by approximately 30% of the students. A substantial number of the students (18%) checked more than one choice. It was believed that students either did not know the size of their community or that the item was stated vaguely.

Eighty-eight percent of the sample reported that they had had previous exposure to library skills (item number five), leaving only 12% who did not admit to past experience in this area.

Percentages were obtained for pre- and post attitudes. The overall results, as presented in Table 1, showed a major change in attitudes on only two of the five attitude statements. (See Table 1 on page 10.)

The most drastic change in attitude involved the statement that reflected students' beliefs that if assigned a research paper, they could find the resources in Joyner to adequately complete the assignment. At the onset of the course, 17% of the students answered yes to this item, while after exposure to the course, 90% believed they could turn out a well-researched paper.

Another drastic change, after exposure to the course, was students' feelings of comfort in doing research in Joyner. On the pre-attitude survey, 15% of the students reported that they did not feel comfortable doing research in Joyner and 51% reported they did not know if they felt comfortable doing research in

Table 1

Frequencies of Responses to

Pre- and Post- Attitude Survey

	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
6. I feel comfortable doing research in Joyner Library	34%	95%	15%	0%	51%	5%
7. Learning to use library resources can help me to be a more competent student	100%	98%	0%	0%	0%	2%
8. Knowing how to use the library can give me confidence as a student	95%	95%	0%	2%	5%	3%
9. The library is an important part of the university	98%	98%	0%	1%	2%	1%
10. If assigned a research paper today, I believe I can find the resources I need to turn out a well-researched paper.	17%	90%	42%	3%	41%	7%

Percentages have been rounded
N 110

Joyner. Only 34% said they did feel comfortable with this. On the post-test, 95% of the students reported that they did feel comfortable doing research in the library.

There was no change in the belief that the library is an important part of the university, as 98% agreed with this statement before and after the course. The two statements reflecting confidence and competence as a result of learning how to use the library showed insignificant change. Students generally agreed that library skills can aid students in feelings of competence and confidence.

The figures in Table 2 indicated the range of scores by percentage of students who gave correct responses to the ten library knowledge items.

Table 2

Range of Scores

Range of Scores Out of 100 Points	Pre-test	Post-test
0-39	67%	0%
40-69	33%	39%
70-100	1%	61%

Percentages have been rounded

N = 110

With regard to the knowledge section of the survey, the average score on the pre-test was 28% while on the post-test, the average score was 77%, showing a difference, or gain, in mean score to be 49%, a large gain in knowledge.

It should be noted that on the pre-test, 99% of the students failed, with 67% of the students scoring an average of less than 40. This means that this number of students answered fewer than an average of four questions correctly on the first day of class. At the end of the course, 61% of the students obtained an average score of 70% or greater, with 39% of the students answering incorrectly an average of four to six items. No students missed more than six questions on the post-test.

Figures in Table 3 on page 13 indicated the number of students who answered each item correctly. Item number one was the only question that was answered correctly by a large majority (70%) of the students at the onset of the course. This item, which reflected knowledge about how to obtain a current magazine, was one that could be shown to have a more obviously easy answer (current periodicals room) so it could be assumed that many students could have guessed and answered this item correctly. On the post-test, 95% of the students indicated the correct answer. The remaining figures in this table show that, on questions two-through ten of the pre-test, no item was answered correctly by a substantial number of students. Item number ten, about the

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Table 3

Students Who Made Correct Responses

to Knowledge Questions

	Pre	Post
1. Current Newsweek Magazine	70%	95%
2. Indexes	11%	62%
3. Book	15%	96%
4. Day-to-day Coverage N. P.	15%	79%
5. Magazine Articles	7%	34%
6. Book on Tunnels	26%	74%
7. Back Issues of Magazines	10%	46%
8. Articles on ESP	26%	50%
9. N.Y. Times Index	4%	90%
10. Today's N. Y. Times	27%	89%

N - 110
Percentage has been rounded

location of today's New York Times, was answered correctly by 27% of all students. Only 26% of students knew that one uses an index to find journal articles and 26% knew that information that can be checked out of the library can be accessed by using LS2000, the online catalog for books in Joyner. A substantial number had used an online catalog in high school, and some were even familiar with LS2000.

Although the serials catalog was covered during class time, only 34% of the students at the end of the course were able to transfer that experience into knowing that one must first use it to find out where a back issue (1986) of a journal is located. Question number seven required the same answer where only 46% of the students seemed to be able to denote the sequence in research steps. Items five and seven seemed to be understood less by the greatest number of students at the end of the course than any other items.

Overall, percentages reflect that students did improve in every area of skills after they took LIBS 1000.With regard to attitudes, percentages also showed that students did view the library as an important part of the university and after having been exposed to LIBS 1000, felt more comfortable about doing research in Joyner.

Discussion

During the course of this research project, this researcher

became aware of certain weaknesses present that could be corrected in future studies of this nature. One weakness was sample size. The number of sections of LIBS 1000 could be increased so that more students could be surveyed. Also, a control group could be added to strengthen or show differences in findings. All students at this university are required to take this one-hour credit course; therefore, in order to have a control group, students who are not registered to take the class until spring semester would have to be surveyed in a class they were enrolled in during Fall semester (i.e. English 1100, the first required English course). Cooperation would have to be solicited from another department in order to provide the needed control group.

Another possibility for strengthening findings from this survey would be the inclusion of additional LIBS 1000 instructors to determine differences arising from teacher personality, experience, and teaching techniques. These differences could be analyzed from the standpoint of educational background and experience of the teachers of the sections studies. Additional items and revisions in item construction might also be considered.

Statistical analysis, and probabilities for validity and reliability would also strengthen findings and conclusions in this research.

It is the opinion of this researcher that further study needs to be done in order to determine what student needs are. In

this study, it was assumed that students gave honest information regarding their needs. This is the population for whom college curriculum is designed. In order to meet the growing needs for library skills, which increasingly involves technology, administrators may need to rethink course requirements and be responsive to these needs where they exist. Library skills can be determinants, not only during the college years for educational success, but also can determine levels of use of public libraries for future educational, cultural, informational, and recreational needs in adult lives long after graduation.

Since there continues to be a lack of consensus as to the most appropriate means of presenting a library skills course, it is recommended that further research be done on the credit-course approach as well as other methods of instruction.

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Appendix

1. My class standing is ____ 1st semester freshman
____ transfer student, 1st sem. at ECU but not a freshman
____ soph., jr., sr.
____ other, describe below
_____

2. Check all library resources you used in high school.
____ online catalog for books
____ CD Rom's
____ serials catalog
____ indexes to newspapers
____ print periodical indexes

3. Check all library resources you have used at ECU.
____ online catalog for books
____ CD Rom's
____ serials catalog
____ indexes to newspapers
____ print periodical indexes

4. Check size of community you lived in before entering ECU.
____ N. C. - pop. of 5,000 or less
____ N. C. - 5,000-10,000
____ N. C. - pop. 10,000-20,000
____ N. C. - pop. 21,000-75,000
____ N. C. - 5,000 pop. within 20 miles of city of 50,000 or more
____ out of state (give state & pop.) ___State ____pop.

5. Library skills were presented in my:
____ High school ____educ. before high school
____ previous college ____not at all

Circle appropriate answer.

6. I feel comfortable doing research in Joyner Library. yes no don't know

7. Learning to use library resources can help me be a more competent student. yes no don't know

8. Knowing how to use the library can give me confidence as a student. yes no don't know

9. The library is an important part of the University yes no don't know

10. If assigned a research paper today, I believe I can find the sources I need to turn out a well-researched paper. yes no don't know

Additional comments about your feelings about using Joyner Library are appreciated. _____

_____

Name _____
SS # _____
Sec. _____
City & State of Residence
_____

Directions: For the 10 items that follow, decide which is the appropriate and expedient library resource. Respond by placing the IDENTIFICATION LETTER of your choice in the blank preceding items 1-10.

A. LS 2000
B. Periodical Indexes
C. Serials Catalog
D. New York Times Index
E. Current Periodicals Room

____ 1. A current newsweek for browsing.

____ 2. Several are on Wilsonline CD-Rom.

____ 3. Book about Black Americans.

____ 4. Day-to-day coverage of JFK's assassination.

____ 5. A professor sends you to read an article in June 1986 Society.

____ 6. Tunnel building information to check out of the library.

____ 7. Does the library have back issues of National Geographic?

____ 8. You need journal articles about ESP.

____ 9. This contains an abstract followed by S, M, L to indicate article length.

____10. Today's New York Times newspaper.